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ABSTRACT

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has designated the week of September 17-21, 2001, as "Back to School Week." During this week, state legislators from throughout the country are encouraged by NCSL to contact principals and teachers in their respective districts and arrange for classroom visits to help students understand the pressures, conflicts, and difficulties that legislators deal with in trying to solve public problems. In general, these lesson plans outline for students the importance of representative democracy, the message that their voices count, and the valid role of special interest groups in the process. This booklet contains four lesson plans: "How Do Teenagers Get a 'Voice?'"; "Don't We All Agree?: Recognizing the Importance of Diversity in Public Policy Making"; "Whose Special Interests? The Role of 'Special Interest Groups' in Legislation"; and "Why Compromise? The Importance of Compromise in a Representative Democracy." Each lesson plan provides a rationale; lists educational objectives; suggests ideas for background preparation and materials; notes time requirements for the lesson; and provides assignments and detailed instructions to define the particular issue. A follow-up lesson (some with numerous issue questions for discussion and others with activities) is included with each lesson plan. (BT)

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE of STATE LEGISLATURES

Trust for Representative Democracy

America's Legislators Back to School Week--High School Lesson Plans.

http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/lessonplans.htm#hschool

Denver Office:
1560 Broadway, Suite 700
Denver, CO 80202
Tel: 303-830-2200
Fax: 303-863-8003

Washington Office:
444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Suite 515
Washington, D.C. 20001
Tel: 202-624-5400
Fax: 202-737-1069

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S. Perrault

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Trust for Representative Democracy

American's Legislators Back to School Week - High School Lesson Plans

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High School Lesson Plan I

How Do Teenagers Get a "Voice"?

Rationale of the Lesson

All over the United States, legislatures are passing laws that immediately and intimately impact teenagers (standards testing, character education, charter schools, anti violence legislation, anti bullying legislation, driving requirements, etc.). If teenagers are asked if they had anything to say about the passage of all these laws, they will invariably say "NO." Yet, it is during these critical teenage years, the "voiceless years", that we try to teach these same young people how important is for them to participate and be responsible citizens in a representative democracy. The apparent contradiction does not go unnoticed. Young people need to be taught how to make their views heard by the people who make laws concerning them. Meeting with a state legislator and talking about specific teenage agendas, discussing ways that teenagers can convey their views to the legislature and exercise influence on the legislation that is passed will help dispel teenage cynicism about government and encourage active citizen participation.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this Lesson, students should be able to:

- identify ways in which they can become aware of the issues introduced in their state legislature.
- clarify and state their views, based on evidence, on current issues likely to come before their legislature.
- understand that the effectiveness of a person's voice depends upon the ability of the person to clearly and persuasively state his/her position.
- speak to and question a state legislator about issues important to them.
- identify effective ways of making themselves heard by government on issues important to them.

Background Preparation/Materials for the Teacher

Contact your America's Legislators Back to School Week state legislative coordinator (http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/contacts_bsw.htm) as soon as possible to arrange for a visit from a legislator during the week of September 17 -21, 2001. As soon as a legislator's visit is arranged, write the legislator a note telling him or her:

- name of the class age of the students
- size of the class

- length of the class and most importantly
- the topics to be discussed in the class.

It would be a good idea to send the legislator a copy of this lesson and the issues about which the students have chosen to make presentations. Give the legislator a chance to be well prepared and everyone will benefit.

THE LESSON PLAN: How do Teenagers Get a "Voice"?

Time Requirements

- Part I - One class period
- Part II - One class period
- Part III - One class period

Part I - One Class Period (one to two weeks before the legislator's visit)

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Assign students to come to class with as many newspaper clippings as they can find about issues concerning their city, county or state that are issues of particular concern to teenagers. Some students may want to watch local TV newscasts for such issues. [Caution students to stick to state issues, not national issues, since they are going to be meeting with a state legislator.]

Brainstorming Session. Write on the board as many issues [i.e. Topics] as students were able to find that are state issues and of interest and concern to teenagers.

Depending on the size of your class, narrow the list to four or five of the most important issues. Divide the class into groups of no more than six students. Assign one of the previously determined issues to each group.

Have each group write its issue in the form of a question. The question should be initially answerable by a yes or no, to be followed by an informed explanation. This will require students to narrow down broad topics into more manageable representations of their concern and set the stage for research into possible answers to their question.

- For example, should students have to pass standardized tests to pass from elementary school to middle school and from middle to school to high school?
- Should video cameras be placed in public areas of schools to help protect students from school violence?

- Should high school students be able to get birth control information and devices from their school clinics?

Each group should discuss its issue in as much depth as possible and arrive at a consensus answer to the question if at all possible.

Assign each group to research its question during the next week to find evidence in support of its position on the issue or in the alternative, evidence that supports a different conclusion. Each student is responsible for finding a least one good argument supported by evidence. This information will be compiled by the group at its next meeting.

Part II - One Class Period

PREPARING TO PRESENT THE ISSUE

Each group should write a three-minute presentation, to be delivered in front of the visiting legislator. The presentation should state what the issue is, what the group's answer to the question is and what evidence the group can offer for its opinion. The statement should be as persuasively phrased as the group can make it. Each student should have a part in delivering the presentation to the legislator. [Since this is all part of an assigned class activity, giving students a grade or credit for their efforts would be a good idea.]

Not a great deal can be said in three minutes so students should strive to be very concise and direct in their statement. Students may put their statement on note cards, which they may use to deliver their statement. Students may want to end their statement with Mr./ Mrs. _____, how do we get a voice in the legislature on this issue?

Part III - One Class Period

MAKING THE CASE TO THE LEGISLATOR

On the day of the legislator's visit, following introductions, each group should give its three-minute presentation. Try to stick very closely to three minutes so that you can give maximum time to the legislator to respond.

After being asked by five or six different groups for ways that teenagers can acquire the ability to influence legislation before the legislature, the legislator will have the rest of the class period to discuss the students' options.

Since the students will have expended considerable effort getting ready for this event, they should be willing to ask questions of the legislator.

POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP LESSON

If your state uses the initiative process, you might invite a speaker from one of the groups who have sponsored an initiative in your state, or other person, knowledgeable about the initiative process, to talk to the class about the concept and practicalities of using initiatives to accomplish the people's will.

Issues - some examples

Although the word issue is used, in common every day parlance, to mean concern, complaint, difference, or disagreement, the word issue here will be used in its legal sense. For our purposes: An issue is a disputed point or question about which reasonable people can and frequently do differ as to the answer.

- Should mentally retarded people, who commit murder, be subject to the death penalty?
- Should DNA testing be done on all persons who commit felonies and the resulting information stored for future law enforcement use?
- Should government be allowed to place video cameras in public places to monitor citizen behavior in public?
- Should the names, addresses and pictures of sex offenders, who have served their time and been released, be published on the internet?
- Should character education be part of the public school required curriculum?
- Should members of the state legislature be subject to term limits?
- Should the drinking age be raised to 21 years?
- Is standardized testing a realistic and reasonable way to improve education?
- Should voting in general elections be made mandatory?
- Are curfews for teenagers a reasonable way to protect them?
- Should violent behavior based on hatred for a particular race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual preference be punished more harshly than violent behavior in general?
- Should homosexual marriage be made legal?
- Should the government have the right to decide who can marry and under what conditions?
- Should late term abortions be legal?
- Should private employers be able to require mandatory, random drug testing as a condition of employment?
- Should the state government provide a voucher system for families to pay for their children's education at public and private - secular or religious schools?
- Should sexual harassment by one student against another student be made a criminal offense?

This project is supported by a Robert H. Michel Civic Education Grant sponsored by The Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

Lesson Plan II -"Don't We All Agree?"

Recognizing the Importance of Diversity in Public Policy Making

Rationale of the Lesson

A recent survey of public opinion concerning important problems facing America revealed the widespread belief that everyone sees the same major problems in America and that differences in opinion occur only as to the solutions to these problems. More detailed studies revealed, however, that Americans actually have very diverse views as to what our national problems are, which are most important and which are the best solutions to these problems. Furthermore, there seems to be a general belief that those who don't agree with popular opinion are under the influence of some special interest and therefore suspect. Yet, democracy is about giving everyone a voice, about a market place of ideas. Widespread diversity of opinion and public distrust of those who differ present very significant problems for lawmakers. The purpose of this lesson is for students to explore the range of opinion on three issues and to gain insight into the challenges facing public policy makers as they try to reconcile the divergent views. Students will research three controversial issues and then present their answers in the format of a legislative hearing. The role of legislators in the hearing will be played by at least one real legislator.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this Lesson, students should be able to:

- discuss the importance of looking at all sides of important public issues before making policy decisions about them
- explain the importance of compromise in the democratic process of public policy making.
- articulate different points of view on an important issue.
- explain the importance of public hearings in the legislature.

Background Preparations/Materials for the Teacher

Contact your America's Legislators Back to School Week state legislative coordinator (http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/contacts_bsw.htm) as soon as possible to arrange for a visit from at least one state legislators during the week of September 17 - 21, 2001. As soon as the date for the legislator's visit is arranged, write the legislator a note telling him or her:

- name of the class

- age of the students
- size of the class
- length of the class and most importantly,
- the questions to be used in the Mock Hearing

The more the legislator knows about what you'd like to accomplish, the better he/she can prepare.

THE LESSON PLAN "Don't We All Agree?"

Time Requirements

- Part I - One Class Period
- Part II - One Class Period
- Part III - One Class Period
- Out of class research time - two weeks

Part I - Setting up the Panels/ Preparing for a Legislative Hearing

Questions:

1. Does our state constitution protect a citizen's right to privacy adequately? Does our state constitution have any better protections for privacy than the U.S. Constitution? Should we pass laws or amend the state and/or U.S. constitutions to provide for better protection for our right to privacy?

    - Should the criminal records of all persons convicted in our state of violent or sexual crimes be available on the internet. Explain.
    - Should the government be allowed to place video cameras in public places to monitor citizen behavior and watch for possible criminal acts? Explain.

2. Should public schools teach classes about ethics, moral values and character? Would such classes violate separation of church and state? Explain.

    - Should daily prayer in public school classrooms be protected as a way of improving the moral behavior of students? Explain.
    - Does a school team saying a prayer before it begins an athletic event violate separation of church and state? Explain.

3. The right of citizens to vote is absolutely essential in a representative democracy. What constitutional protections exist for our right to vote? Has our fundamental right to vote been violated when some votes are not counted because of voting errors. The New York Times has estimated that as many as four million votes did

not count in the 2000 election. Does this damage the legitimacy of the election of the president or others who were elected by very close margins? Explain.

- Should we have a uniform method for voting for the president, vice president and members of Congress? Who should pay for the cost of improvements in the voting process?
- Should voters be required to demonstrate that they can read and that they understand the voting process before they are allowed to vote? Explain.

Choose three groups of students [3 to 5 students per group] to respond to the three questions above and act as witnesses in a legislative hearing. Each group or panel shall be required to prepare to formally answer one of the questions [including all of it's subparts]. Students who do not participate on one of the panels will serve as judges at the legislative hearings.

Explain to the students how the legislative hearing will be conducted. Each panel of students will sit as a group in front of a panel of legislators. The legislators will introduce themselves and then ask the students to introduce themselves. One of the legislators will read the entire question to the students. The students will then respond with a three-minute opening statement that gives a brief answer to all parts of the question. The Legislators will then question the students for five minutes. After the completion of the student's "testimony," the legislators will give students feedback on how they did. [three minutes] The other two panels will then testify in the same manner as the first.

Brainstorm in class possible answers to each of the questions. The whole class should participate. The three panels of students should spend at least a week doing research on their questions. Since there are several students on each panel they can divide up the work to save time. Students should find as much evidence as they can to support their answers.

Part II - Preparing Opening Statements

Each panel of students should have at least one class period to write its opening statement. While the panels are working on their opening statements, the rest of the students should write questions they'd like to ask the visiting legislator(s).

Part III - The Legislative Hearing

Arrange classroom as much as possible to resemble a legislative hearing room.

HEARING

- Introductions
- Question Read

STUDENTS OPENING STATEMENT [3 minutes]

LEGISLATOR[S] ASK FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS [4 minutes]

- Feedback from Legislators [3 minutes]
- Repeat process with next two panels
- If time permits after the three panels have testified, then class discussion with the legislators can follow.
- At the end of the class period all students serving as judges should turn in their judging forms.

This project is supported by a Robert H. Michel Civic Education Grant sponsored by The Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

LEGISLATIVE HEARING SCORE SHEET

Group # _____ Question # _____

Evaluator [student judge] _____

For each criterion listed, score the group on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best score.

1 - 2 = Poor 3 - 4 = Fair 5 - 6 = Average 7 - 8 = Above Average 9 - 10 = Excellent

	Score	Notes
1. UNDERSTANDING: To what extent did participants demonstrate a clear understanding of basic issues involved in the questions.		
2. CONSTITUTIONAL APPLICATION: To what extent did participants appropriately apply knowledge of constitutional history and principles?		
3. REASONING: To what extent did participants support positions with sound reasoning?		
4. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE: To what extent did participants support positions with historical or contemporary evidence, examples and/or illustrations?		
5. EVIDENCE: To what extent did participants support positions with historical or contemporary evidence, examples and/or illustrations?		
6. RESPONSIVENESS: To what extent did participants' answers address the questions asked?		
7. PARTICIPATION: To what extent did most group members contribute to the groups presentation?		
Group Total		

Lesson Plan III - "Whose Special Interests?"

The Role of "Special Interest Groups" in Legislation

Rationale of the Lesson

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries "special interests" have, in the public view, become the very essence of evil in politics and public policy making. In 1787, in Federalist #10, James Madison warned us of the dangers of "factions." Madison said, "by a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." Madison concluded that the way to control the problems of faction was to create a large republic where no one faction could gain undue influence. The problem today is that many people believe that interest groups have acquired undue influence compared to the influence of the public at large. However, the facts of American political life tend to support a different view of interest groups.

It is very common political behavior for Americans to come together in voluntary associations in an effort to deal with mutual problems or address common concerns. [Farm Bureau, AFL-CIO, MADD, NAACP, NOW] It is also very common for such groups to seek to have their views heard by legislatures by hiring lobbyists to speak for them. Many groups form political action committees [PACs] to support the election of candidates they believe have views compatible with their views. The very special interests we fear and complain about may actually be "us." The purpose of this exercise is to determine if the public perception of interest groups is accurate and to determine what effects these groups have on legislation.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this Lesson, students should be able to:

- define the terms faction, interest group, association, lobbyist, political action committee.
- identify and explain the concerns many citizens have with interest group politics.
- identify the arguments in favor of interest group politics and lobbying
- discuss the effects of interest group activities on legislation

Background Preparation/ Materials for the Teacher

Contact your America's Legislators Back to School Week state legislative coordinator (http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/contacts_bsw.htm) as soon as possible to arrange for a visit from a legislator during the week of September 17 - 21, 2001. As soon as a legislator's visit is arranged, write the legislator a note telling him or her:

- name of the class
- age of the students
- size of the class
- length of the class
- topics to be addressed in the visit, include a copy of this lesson plan.

Obtain a copy of Federalist Paper #10 by James Madison for every student to use in class. A good, readable copy can be obtained from the AVALON PROJECT AT YALE UNIVERSITY at http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/federal/fed.htm

Another source of Federalist Papers is from THOMAS - PROJECT GUTENBERG at: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html

Another excellent source for all historical and political science background resources is the LIBERTY LIBRARY OF CONSTITUTIONAL CLASSICS at: http://www.constitution.org/liberlib.htm

To obtain information on the voting record of your state legislator or congressman as seen through the eyes of various interest groups use the following very helpful site at PROJECT VOTE SMART: http://www.vote-smart.org [go to categories - choose special interest groups to see how your legislators were rated by various groups]

THE LESSON PLAN - " Who are the Special Interests?"--"What Effect do They Have on Public Policy Making?"

Time Requirement--Approximately four class periods plus an extra day for poll taking.

Part I - Read and discuss in class - Federalist #10 by James Madison.

- What did James Madison say he meant by faction [ie. interest group]?
- What danger to American representative democracy and freedom did Madison believe factions represented?
- What solution did Madison see to the dangers of factions?
- Do we still have factions today? What do we call them? What are some examples of modern factions? Modern estimates suggest that there are more than 20,000 interest groups in America today. What would James Madison think of this? Did his concerns turn out to be true?

Part II - Assignment

Use the poll form on pages 3 and 4 to get an idea of the groups people belong to in your school community. Have each student ask the poll questions of ten adults. Make sure everyone asks different adults. Give students two days to collect data.

Have students do the poll on themselves in class. It will be interesting to see how the students and adults compare in their answers.

A more complete list of special advocacy groups and what they believe in can be found on the Internet at Political Advocacy Groups: Alphabetical List of All Groups http://www.csuchico.edu/kcfount/alpha.html

Collect and tabulate results.

OPINION POLL

Part III. - Discuss the results on your opinion poll. Discuss answers to the questions below.

What conclusions can you draw from your poll?

Do members of groups seem to recognize that they are part of "special interests?"

Are special interest groups protected by the 1st amendment's "freedom of speech and association?" Should they be?

What limitations, if any, should be placed on the activities of special interest groups?

- lobbying?
- forming political action committees to elect candidates with like views?
- spending money on campaigns?
- joining law suits as amicus curiae before the appellate courts to argue for the groups view of issues?
- testifying before legislative committees?

Have individuals, acting alone, lost the ability to persuade legislators to vote one way or another on legislation?

Part IV - Using the Project Vote Smart web site determine if there are any interest group evaluations of the voting record of the legislator who is coming to visit you.

Legislator's visit

- Conduct a PRESS CONFERENCE with the legislator asking the legislator questions about the role of special interests in your state legislature.

- Each student should prepare at least three questions, in writing, to ask the legislator. Use your poll results to see what the legislator thinks of what you have found.

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Lesson Plan IV - "Why Compromise?"

The Importance of Compromise in a Representative Democracy

Rationale of the Lesson

In an ideal world, where everyone agreed on what needed to be done to resolve every possible problem, there would be no need for debate and compromise to make the important decisions of public life. In the real world, in a representative democracy such as ours, everyone's views must be heard and respected. In a nation as big and diverse as America is today, the only way public policy can be made is through the process of debate and compromise. That doesn't mean that policy makers must "sell out their principles" in order to make decisions or create laws. It does mean that policy makers and citizens alike must understand that there is almost always more than one reasonable, viable way to accomplish a desired goal, that working together necessarily requires the resolution of differences of opinion and that each proponent of a view must be able to bend a little to get things done. Our whole history of constitutional government is based on the successful compromises made at the constitutional convention in 1787. The goal in this lesson is to demonstrate to students that goals can be achieved, differences can be resolved effectively, through compromise. This will be accomplished by conducting a legislative debate in class.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this Lesson, students should be able to.

- understand that in a diverse society, such as ours, a wide range of views on important issues is normal and often helpful in giving us the best range of options from which we can make choices.
- explain how the process of compromise works to aid in the legislative process.
- demonstrate the use of compromise to resolve differences of opinion on an important issue.

Background Preparation/Materials of the Teacher

Contact your America's Legislators Back to School Week state legislative coordinator (http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/contacts_bsw.htm) as soon as possible to arrange for a visit from a legislator during the week of September 17 - 21, 2001. As soon as a legislator's is arranged, write the legislator a note telling him or her:

- name of the class
- age of the students
- size of the class
- length of the class
- topics to be addressed in the visit, include a copy of this lesson plan. Ask the legislator to be the Speaker of the House in your mock legislative debate.

Included with the directions to this lesson are a sample hill format to assist students in writing their bills, and a simplified parliamentary procedure chart to assist in the mock legislative debate.

THE LESSON PLAN - "Why Compromise? The Importance of Compromise in a Representative Democracy"

Time Requirement - one week for preparation and reproduction of bills and one class period to debate the bills

Part I - Assign students to write a bill to be debated in a mock legislative debate.

Use the simplified bill format following this lesson You might want to allow students to work in pairs to speed the process of bill writing and reduce the number of bills you will be dealing with for debate.

From the set of bills you get from the students, choose the best four to use during the mock legislative debate. Make copies of those bills for the class and the visiting legislator.

Possible bill topics [keep bills as simple as possible, stick to state issues]:

- a list of issues follows Lesson I, "How do Teenagers Get a Voice" that could become subjects for bills
- other topics:
    - stem cell research [should state support funding?]
    - standardized testing of students in public schools/ grading of schools based on student scores
    - gun control
    - voting reform
    - violence prevention in public schools

Part II - MOCK LEGISLATIVE DEBATE

- With the visiting legislator as your presiding officer, conduct a mock legislative debate on the bills your students have written.
- The authors of the bills being debated should be prepared to give an authorship speech in support of their bill.

- Opponents of bills should also do some planning as to what they might argue in opposition to the bill under debate.

Sequence of events for student legislature

- Call House to order
- Establish Orders of the Day [ie. by motion decide in what order the bills will be debated]
- Call the first bill --House clerk reads the bill
- Speaker calls for authorship speech - author gives short statement on why people should vote for the bill, ending with . . . "I move this bill be adopted."
- Speaker calls for a 2nd [a motion + a second officially puts the bill on the floor for debate]
- Speaker calls for Opponent Speech
- Proponent Speech
- Opponent Speech
- [the debate should demonstrate differing points of view and how someone can propose a compromise between the opposing view points].
- Continue debate until someone moves the Previous questions [a motion that asks that the debate stop and that a vote be taken on the bill]
- Motions for amendments can be made in between speeches.

Repeat process for each bill.

Stop the process with about ten minutes left in the class period so that the legislator can make suggestions on how the students did and answer their questions.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

An interesting question for the legislator might be -- What would you do if your constituents want you to vote yes on a bill and your conscience tells you to vote no?

For example:

- Your constituents want to have marijuana available for medical use in your state, but you believe this is wrong. [disregarding federal issue involved]
- Your constituents favor fetal stem cell research, you oppose it as a matter of ethical principle.

If the legislator votes his conscience on these kinds of issues, the opposite of his constituents, how do the citizens who disagree get heard?

BILL FORMAT

STUDENT MODEL LEGISLATURE

Sponsored by _[Student(s) names]

Committee Action:

AN ACT TO [complete the title in all capital letters] Every law should embrace only one subject and that should be expressed in the title. Make the title as concise as possible, but broad enough to clearly indicate the scope of the bill.

Be it enacted by the student model legislature of _____state_____

Section 1. Definitions In complete sentences, define any word or phrase used in your title which might be subject to confusion or result in unnecessary debate.

Section 2. Purpose The purpose section simply states concisely why you think the bill should be enacted. The purpose section is optional.

Section 3. Provisions This clause is the most important part of your bill. In complete sentences explain exactly what you want to happen and how. What you say here should say the same thing as your title only in much greater detail. The bill should be written in the present tense. If you want to require something to happen, use the word "shall" [eg. no person shall water their lawn more than three times a week during a drought]. Try to anticipate questions that people might have after reading your bill and address those questions in this section.

Section 4. Penalty Clause This clause is necessary only if your bill makes something illegal. If you are designating some behavior a crime, you must specifically say if it will be considered a misdemeanor or felony. Check your state's criminal code to see what the penalties are for each level of misdemeanor or felony.

Section 5. Appropriations Clause This clause is necessary only if your bill requires the expenditure of money. Indicate the amount of money to be spent and how that amount of money will be raised.

Section 6. Enactment Clause This clause tells when the bill will become effective. Examples include: This bill will become effective upon the signature of the Governor or this bill will become effective 90 days after signature by the Governor.

Section 7. Safetv Clause. The mock student legislature of the state of _____hereby finds, determines and declares that this ACT is necessary for the preservation of public health, peace and safety. [simply copy this statement.]

[A safety clause is a legislative requirement to certify that the legislate has properly determined that the bill they propose to pass into law is legitimately necessary for a proper reason under the state and federal constitutions.]

If you do not need a particular type of optional clause above, simply leave it out and move everything up a section.

PRINCIPAL PARLIAMENTARY RULES REGARDING MOTIONS

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